DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 222 910 CS 207 238

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TITLE Business and the Media.
INSTITUTION Freedom of Information Center, Columbia, Mo.
REPORT NO FOI-463
PUB DATE Sep 82
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business; *Conflict; Journalism; *News Media; *News Reporting; Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Business Media Relationship; *Business News; Media Bias

ABSTRACT

By virtue of the different natures of the two institutions, the relationship between business and the media is simultaneously adversarial and symbiotic: the media see themselves as society's watchdog while business sees itself as society's driving economic force. Meanwhile, business relies on the media for information, and the media rely on business for advertising revenue. While business news coverage has existed for 400 years, its recent growth has led to a strain in the relationship of the two institutions. Although studies have yielded a variety of complaints about the media from business, four general criticisms are stated most frequently: (1) simplistic reporting of complex issues and problems; (2) careless, negligent, and inaccurate reporting; (3) exaggeration and sensational reporting; and (4) overemphasizing negative news, an indication of an antibusiness bias. Although not all criticism of the media by business is justified, poor coverage may be partly explained by inadequate media staff and training, reporter carelessness or negligence, and a preference for sensationalism. In spite of the adversarial relationship between media and business, possible solutions to some of the problems between them include increased objectivity, better communication, and greater mutual respect. (JL)

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SEPTEMBER, 1982

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BUSINESS AND THE MEDIA

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTER REPORT NO. 463

This report was written by Lisa Barchie, a master's candidate at the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

The business of America is business.[1]
Calvin Coolidge

Six years ago, the Des Moines **Register** added eight more members to its business news staff, which had consisted of two reporters. The enlarged staff enabled the **Register** to undertake many projects, including a periodic survey of the salaries of corporate executives. Businesspeople reacted by complaining that the surveys invaded their privacy, hindered labor negotiations and could even encourage criminals to kidnap their children.

Editor Michael Gartner, a former reporter for the **Wall Street Journal**, justified the coverage as part of the news function of gathering, reporting and printing matters of public record that "are available to anyone, but that would be difficult and time-consuming for each person to dig out."[2] The complaints continued as the newspaper's coverage of business news increased. The **Register** was accused of being sympathetic to strikers in a long and bitter labor dispute. In an investigative story about two Boston promoters who used a Des Moines bank to launder part of $20 million received from investors in a coal mine tax shelter, businesspeople charged that the story unfairly implied the money was obtained illegally.

But the most serious comment by the business community was caused by a brief article which mentioned that a local banker was being treated for alcoholism. Local reaction by businesspeople and the community was so critical that Gartner offered his readers an explanation for printing the story:

> We printed the story because John (Fitzgibbon) is a big man around town. When he got the job it was news. When he led the bank to growth and continued success, it was news. And when he went on medical leave, it was news — probably better news than we made it.[3]

Gartner's explanation failed to appease businesspeople. At one point, William Freedman Jr., president of Yonkers Department store, stopped advertising in the newspaper. "We felt they had been picking on us," he said, adding, "The paper puts too much emphasis on what's wrong and not enough on what's right about business and the free enterprise system." Freedman contended that "there is a definite liberal bias in the reporting."[4]

However, when the businesspeople were asked to cite specific stories they considered biased, close examination of the articles usually revealed the charges to be insignificant and unsubstantiated. For example, a six-part series on the workplace health hazards of Firestone Tire and Rubber Company plant was called "inflammatory" by local manager J. B. Walters. The series turned out to be a well-documented, rational and balanced presentation of a significant issue. Instead of implying that Firestone "totally destroyed" the health of one of its Des Moines employees, as Walters said it did, the series pointed out that a Firestone employee was awarded only 20 percent disability benefits, and it extensively reported company assurances that any workplace hazards had been corrected. James P. Gannon, executive editor of the **Register**, attributed much of the local business community's animosity to its faulty perception of the journalist's role.

A businessperson judges a story by its effects — good or bad — on his or her business and assumes that if the effect is harmful to his business, the reporter who wrote it must have intended to do harm. But reporters and editors judge a story not by its effect on a business but on whether it is interesting and significant.[5]

Consequently, about two dozen Des Moines businesspeople signed a statement accusing the **Register** of unbalanced, unfair and cynical coverage.

Such accusations from businesspeople concerning business news coverage are not uncommon. Like the Des Moines **Register**, newspapers and other media have been accused of offering simplistic, biased and inaccurate coverage. Much of the criticism stems from the ambiguous relationship which exists between the media and business.

The purpose of this paper is three-fold; to examine the ambiguous relationship between the two, to present and analyze the criticisms of business news coverage by business leaders and media representatives, and to offer possible solutions for improving and increasing coverage.

The ambiguity of the relationship between business and the media is the result of the divergent functions of each institution in society while, at the same time, the goal of both — as business enterprises — is to make a profit. Donald S. Naughton, chairman of the Prudential Insurance Company of America, described the relationship in a 1976 speech (New York **Times**, 7 March 1976):

Summary

The relationship between business and the media can be compared to that of a cobra and a mongoose. As the media have begun to place greater emphasis on business news, the business community has charged the media with simplistic, careless, sensational and biased coverage.

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> Our country is 200 years old. We have enjoyed the fruits of the free market system for two centuries. Yet here we are, business and the news media, like two strange dogs, circling each other warily, suspicious of each other's intentions.

The relationship between these "two strange dogs" is adversarial because the media see themselves as the watchdogs of society, making sure, in the case of business, that business serves the public interest. On the other hand, business views itself as the driving economic force of society, as honest, frank, hardworking and slavishly responsible to stockholders, employees and government. The sympathetic aspect of the relationship involves the media's structure as business enterprises trying to make a profit.

Despite the adversarial functions, the two institutions are symbiotic, as the business world relies on the media for information and the media rely on advertising revenue in order to print information. This symbiosis has its roots in the Renaissance, where business and business journalism, in their most primitive forms, developed on parallel tracks.[6]

PARALLEL GROWTH OF BUSINESS AND BUSINESS JOURNALISM

Today's daily business pages, with their multiple columns listing stock transactions on the various national and regional exchanges, have their beginnings in publications issued almost 400 years ago. When the world's first stock exchange opened in Amsterdam in 1531, a "price-current" publication was introduced with commodities printed in type and the prices handwritten. Later, price-currents were printed entirely in type, providing a uniform publication to more people. The oldest existing such publication is dated November 23, 1609, and carries information on more than 200 commodities. About 75 years later, the price-current was introduced in England.

But it was in the American colonies that the greatest growth in price-current journalism occurred. The first price-current was published in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1752. As business centers were established in such cities as New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Boston, the popularity of price-currents increased.

Shipping news was added when American trade expanded after the Revolutionary War. On September 1, 1827, the **Journal of Commerce** published its first issue. Although it was issued daily and contained only a small business news section, it included the word "commerce" in order to attract advertising. By 1865, the business press was thriving.

The most important event in financial journalism was the founding of Dow Jones and Company in 1822. Dow Jones was organized by two New England reporters, Charles H. Dow and Edward H. Jones, to collect information on brokerage houses. The initial publication was a one-page letter, but by 1889 Dow and Jones expanded into newspaper publishing with the **Wall Street Journal**. Clarence W. Barron bought the **Journal** in 1902 and under his leadership the newspaper expanded its coverage to the entire country. Today, the **Journal** leads in the national coverage of economic and business affairs and its growth continues to set the pace for other newspapers.[7]

As Seymour Topping, managing editor of the New York **Times**, observed, "It was not until the beginning of this decade (the 1970s) that the press generally began to cover business with the same depth applied to other subjects."[8] Other media industries have increased their business coverage, including broadcasters, the wire services, and such general interest magazines as **Time** and **Newsweek**.

BUSINESS AND MEDIA: WARRING AND WOOING

Along with the increase in business coverage has come both an increase in criticism of the coverage by business and a strain in the relationship between the two institutions. The relationship was the subject of a two-year study released in July 1981 by the American Management Association.[9] The study was undertaken by Research and Forecasts, Inc., a subsidiary of the Ruder and Finn public relations firm. Data was gathered from interviews with corporate executives and media representatives involved in six cases in which major differences had developed over news treatment of a subject. A survey of journalists, chief executive officers and corporate public relations representatives of **Fortune** 1000 companies was also included in the project.

The study found:

- About one-third of each group — CEO's, public relations representatives and journalists — said that the media are always or usually antagonistic toward the community, and about six out of 10 agreed that the media are sometimes antagonistic.
- Most public relations directors said that their companies have received favorable media treatment in such matters as annual financial reports (79%), executive appointments (78%), product news (70%), mergers and acquisitions (65%) and stock activities (54%). The only areas in which more than five of the public relations directors said that their companies have received unfavorable coverage are plant accidents (6%), hiring and lay-offs (8%) and environmental issues.
- Two-thirds (64%) of journalists and 62% of public relations directors said that reporters do not research their topics thoroughly and most in each group said that when business reporting is inaccurate it is because of sloppiness rather than reporter bias.
- Approximately one-third of the journalists (36%) said business executives often lie to reporters, a view shared by 7% of the public relations people. But only one-third (32%) of the public relations people said they are always given enough information about their companies to communicate effectively with the media. And almost half (47%) acknowledged that they themselves have withheld information from the media — a practice virtually all journalists feel that all levels of top management engage in.
- A majority of journalists (81%), CEO's (79%) and public relations representatives (77%) said that fewer than half of all business executives understand the workings of the media. Yet 94% of CEO's said that they themselves understand the media at least fairly well, and 98% of public relations representatives said they themselves always or usually do.
- More than twice as many journalists as public relations people (58% to 24%) said that media presentation is more important than factual reporting. But twice as many public relations directors as journalists (40% to 20%) said that when a reporter calls executives for information, he or she already has a slant on the story.

In general, the study indicated the antagonisms, sympathies and misunderstandings between business and the me-

dia.

A Gallup Organization poll, done for the **Wall Street Journal**, found that the business press received good or excellent ratings from 69% of large-company executives, 76% of medium-sized company executives and 56% of the small-business proprietors (**Wall Street Journal**, 21 September 1982). The business press seemed fair or poor to the heads of 26% of the big companies, 20% of the middle-sized firms and 31% of the small companies.

Gallup conducted telephone interviews with 327 business leaders, almost all chief executives, of companies randomly drawn from **Fortune** magazine's listing of the 1,350 largest companies in the United States. Interviews were also conducted with 312 chief executives of medium-sized concerns and 206 small-business proprietors.

For purposes of the study, the business press was defined as such publications as **Business Week**, **Fortune**, **Forbes**, the **Wall Street Journal**, and the business sections of major metropolitan newspapers. The business leaders were asked about their attitudes toward business coverage. The survey found:

- Objections vary by company size. When executives were asked to name their biggest complaint, 17% of the big-company executives cited "a tendency toward sensationalism," while only 6% of the heads of medium-size companies and 2% of the small-business leaders named this gripe. Biased writing was also cited more often by the big-company heads.
- Inaccurate reporting was cited as the biggest complaint by 20% of the heads of big companies, 12% of the leaders of the medium-sized companies and 9% of the small-business leaders. The greatest complaint of the small-business owner is being ignored, with 24% citing this as their biggest complaint. This was true for 16% of the medium-sized company heads and only 5% of the big-company heads.
- Business executives often believe it is possible to keep secret a negative aspect of a corporate development that the company isn't legally obligated to divulge. About half of the executives — 50% at the big firms, 56% at the medium-sized companies and 47% at the small companies — said it is "not too likely" or "not likely at all" that the information will be revealed. A smaller group — 41% at the big companies, 37% at the medium-sized companies and 43% at the small companies — said this is "fairly likely" or "very likely."
- Business executives generally do not think financial journalists are malicious or hostile to business. Most executives — 81% at the big firms, 80% at the medium-sized firms and 72% at the small firms — said the label "fair-minded" describes journalists fairly well or very well. A minority — 35% at the big companies, 36% at the middle-sized companies and 41% at the small companies — said journalists are anti-business.
- On the other hand, most executives said business journalists are "likely to cover complex issues simplistically." This was mentioned by 80% of the big-company heads, 71% of the medium-sized company heads and 65% of the small-company heads. About 62% of the executives at large and medium-sized companies said that business journalists are knowledgeable about their industries; this figure drops to 51% among the small business leaders.
- A majority — 78% at the big companies and 70% at the middle-sized and small firms — said business journalists are more interested in covering unfavorable than favorable business news. A smaller number — 57% at the big and small companies and 49% at the medium-sized — said business journalists are "prone to factual errors."
- Only 12% of the big-company leaders said business journalists are "influenced by a fear of offending advertisers." The figure was higher for the medium-sized company heads, 33%, and for the small-business leaders, 55%.
- Twenty-four percent of the big-company leaders, 38% of the medium-sized company leaders, and 62% of small company leaders described business journalists as "gullible."
- Numerous executives suggested changes in business coverage, including increased international coverage and better coverage of smaller, growth-oriented firms.

MAJOR COMPLAINTS BY BUSINESS

Although the criticisms of the media by business are as varied and numerous as the business industries themselves, four general criticisms are stated frequently. They are: simplistic reporting of complex issues and problems; careless, negligent and inaccurate reporting; exaggeration and sensational reporting; and overemphasizing negative news, which shows biased reporting and editing.

The first criticism involves the tendency of reporters to treat complex issues and problems as simple conflicts or else to ignore the complex issues altogether. Herbert Stein, former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under President Nixon and later a professor of economics at the University of Maryland, distinguishes between micro-reporting and macro-reporting, saying, "While there is much good reporting of the economy in the small (such as commodity prices and corporate dividends), the media's performance is seriously flawed in reporting the bigger stories."[10]

A 1980 survey conducted by the Los Angeles**Times** (A. Kent MacDougall, Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980) supports Stein's assessment. The study focused on how major metropolitan newspapers and the three commercial television networks cover business.

The first phase of the study solicited and examined complaints from scores of major corporations and business trade associations. The complaints were matched against the media's performance. The study found that newspapers continue to wrap bland news releases from local businesses and wire stories from New York and Washington around column after column of stock and bond tables, commodity future prices, foreign exchange rates and other minutiae of interest to only a small fraction of their readers.

Despite the lack of reader interest, Kent MacDougall, who conducted the study, said that many newspapers, including the **Times**, actually are publishing additional stock tables. By eliminating some of the stock tables and other financial mystery figures, a lot of space would be available for in-depth articles of interest to general readers as well as to investors.

According to a University of North Carolina School of Journalism survey (A. Kent MacDougall, Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980), the public is more interested in coverage of national and local business, new products and how business works than in the stock market.

The impact of these studies is even more significant because the newspaper is the primary source of local business news.[11] Unfortunately, most papers continue to provide superficial coverage, according to Chris Welles, director of the William Bagehot Fellowship Program in Economics and

Business Journalism. Welles, speaking at the University of Missouri's Key Lecture Series in 1978-79, said:

> At the St. Louis airport, I picked up a copy of the St. Louis **Globe-Democrat** and turned to the business section. The first page of the section had eight main stories. All were rewrites of press releases or reports of speeches from such organizations as Anheuser-Busch, Inc., Angelica Corporation, the Missouri Division of Employment Security, the Chemical Council of Greater St. Louis and the Home Builders Association of Greater St. Louis. In none of these stories did the reporter include the perspective of anyone other than the issuer of the release or the maker of the speech. I don't want to conclude from just one day's sampling that this section is typical of the **Globe-Democrat**. Yet I would argue that this is typical of the daily business coverage of far too many of the country's newspapers.[12]

As one explanation for this typical coverage, Welles suggested that the size of the business news staff does not always increase in proportion to the increase in business news coverage. Short-staffing is the norm at smaller papers. A 1977 survey (Kent MacDougall, Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980) showed that 93 percent of American dailies with less than 100,000 circulation typically had a business news staff of only one person. Medium-sized papers of 100,000 to 250,000 circulation had four.

Ernest C. Hynds confirmed the situation in a national survey of daily newspapers.[13] Most daily papers do not have business staffs, the study indicated. They rely on outside sources and staff members who do other things in addition to covering business to produce their business coverage. The Hynds' study also showed that less than one-third (29%) of the newspapers surveyed have even one person assigned full-time to handle business news; 11.3% have two or more persons assigned full-time.

Another reason for the lack of in-depth coverage is that reporters are often poorly equipped with the business skills needed to write an interesting and clear news story. For this reason, many corporations and foundations are underwriting university programs aimed at upgrading business reporters' skills. These programs are offered at Columbia and Carnegie-Mellon universities and at the University of Missouri at Columbia. "These programs may not make reporters pro-business, but they do make them more knowledgeable and less likely to go off on ill-informed attacks," Chris Welles said (Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980).

An example of an ill-informed reporter that media critics refer to is the wire service reporter who covered an annual meeting of American Telephone and Telegraph; during a vigorous quizzing of the chief financial officer, the reporter displayed his ignorance of the difference between stocks and bonds.[14]

At the same time businesspeople are asking for more in-depth coverage, they are charging that business writing is careless, negligent and inaccurate. They often quote a cliche: "I've never seen accurate reporting about anything I know anything about."[15] Louis Banks, former managing editor of **Fourtune**, who now runs a seminar on business and the media at M.I.T.'s Sloan School, listed specific complaints:

> Careless news stories present business executives as saying things they never said, or corporations as doing things they never intended to do. In the reporting of figures, apples are compared to oranges and decimal points slide back and forth.[16]

Welles, agreeing with Banks' observation, provided a broader interpretation as to why this carelessness and inaccuracy exists. The growing distrust and suspicion of society's major institutions, particularly big business and big government, is appealed to by reporters and editors, he says. "Because this distrust seems to sell papers, the media have been playing to these feelings, often at the expense of accepted standards of fair and accurate journalism," asserted Welles.[17]

The distrust Welles refers to became even more intense in the post-Vietnam and post-Watergate eras, not only between business and government, but also between labor and the press. For example, the Watergate scandal exposed by the Washington **Post** revealed many corporate slush funds and international political pay-offs. For the press, Watergate also initiated many court battles and much criticism over investigative reporting techniques. The mutual distrust continues today.

Unfair and inaccurate journalism was one charge made by business about a story in **Newsweek**. The story concerned the Kerr-McGee Corporation and the controversy over the death of Karen Silkwood, an employee of the company who had questioned the safety of a Kerr-McGee plutonium factory. A company official wrote to **Newsweek** about the story, claiming that it was "more a press release for the Silkwood attorneys than a news story" and that **Newsweek** had failed to include any comments by Kerr-McGee. Furthermore, the story failed to mention statements the company had made to the reporter. In a note following the letter, **Newsweek** said it "regrets its failure to include Kerr-McGee's comments in its original story."[18]

This failure to present a complete story receives much criticism from business. Deadlines and lack of space are not considered excuses for a carelessly written story. Herbert Schmertz, president of Mobil Oil Company, said, "I have no sympathy for deadline problems, because they are caused by competitive considerations, not journalistic necessity. If a story is incomplete, it ought to be held for a day. It is better to report it a day late, but full." (Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980).

Competitive considerations may explain some carelessness, but carelessness begins with the reporter who writes the story, chooses quotes and arranges the content and structure. Lewis Young, editor-in-chief of **Business Week**, says that compression, because of lack of space or time, can change the meaning and thrust of a story. Young, speaking at the University of Missouri Key Lecture Series in 1978-79, said:

> The meaning and thrust can also be changed when a reporter fails to qualify statements and thus ascribes a degree of absolution that the interviewee never intended. Using only half a quote can make the speaker say exactly the opposite of what he meant. Quoting out of context is a frequent criticism raised against journalists in that what they told the reporter was taken out of context.[19]

Another aspect of this carelessness, businesspeople complain, involves corrections that are not handled correctly by the media and, consequently, cause unnecessary damage because "errors aren't corrected promptly and prominently enough." (Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980). What busi-

nesspeople want is to have a front page error corrected on the front page, instead of an inside pages, which is standard practice. The correction should run on the front page under a headline as large as the original, they argue. Businesspeople also assert that any added embarrassment the front page correction would cause might be more than offset by enhanced credibility and reader goodwill (Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980).

As more business news continues to make the front page, cities with competing markets especially resort to sensationalism and exaggeration, which was thought to have died several decades ago. Businesspeople complain about such treatment because bigger headlines are given to the odd, the trivial or the exceptional news rather than to more constructive progress being made. Four years ago, the Washington **Post** printed a front page story detailing that the U.S. Comptroller of the Currency had placed Citibank and Chase Manhattan, two of the nation's largest banks, on a confidential list of "problem" banks. The list consisted of banks that made numerous high risk loans and needed additional federal supervision. Despite the validity of the story, the newspaper was accused of sensationalism and overemphasizing the seriousness of the banks' condition (Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980).

The New York **News** came under similar criticism. When the Federal Trade Commission released a report critical of life insurance, the **News** headline read: "FTC: Some Life Policies Are Rip-Offs." The FTC never used the word "rip-off." Robert A. Beck, chairman of Prudential Insurance Company of America, said he resented the word: "That's a very tough word to compete against." (Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980).

Some more common examples of sensationalism involve movement on the stock market. When the Dow Jones index gains or loses even one percentage point, newspapers like the Los Angeles **Times** run headlines such as "Stocks Soar" or "Dow Tumbles.". Because the Dow Jones is an index rather than an average, and fluctuations must be analyzed over a period of time, reporting daily gains and losses under front page headlines seems somewhat misleading or at least emphasize the trivial.

By far the most common complaint voiced by businesspeople is that the media are anti-business, reporting only negative news. The term "negative" encompasses reports on corporate overcharges, faulty products and monopolistic practices. According to the Los Angeles **Times** study (A. Kent MacDougall, Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980), such negative news usually appears on the front page while the positive news of new jobs, community involvement and technological innovations appears in the business and economic sections. However, this study, which turned up considerable evidence supporting complaints that media coverage is often simplistic, careless and cursory, also stated that cases in which deliberate distortion could be documented were rare.

In 1976, Frederic West, president of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, told the American Newspaper Publishers Association about negative news coverage:

> Sometimes business complaints that the media 'are out to get us whenever they can' are legitimate. When you keep getting the same kind of treatment day after day, in the same papers, and by the same writers, you can't help feeling persecuted. It would be unfair to make a blanket charge of business bias by the press. It's true that journalists often seem to be suspicious of business but they're equally suspicious of just about everybody in positions of power, influence and wealth.[20]

Not all businesspeople qualify their criticisms of negative news. James Ferguson, chairman of General Foods, and his staff refuse to talk to the media "because the media is (sic) looking for bad news."[21] Ferguson and his executives are uncooperative and are rarely available to the press. The company issues statements prepared only by Ferguson and makes no informal comment or offers any comment. Even **Business Week** cannot succeed in gaining General Foods' view on any subject.

Some critics, like Welles, believe, however, that the government, and not the media, has initiated much of the negative news. It is the government that issues a stream of revelations about corporate pollution, poor working conditions, faulty products, price-rigging, creative accounting and contributions to political slush funds. In reporting the negative news, the media may have magnified the negatives, but even this magnification is a reflection of government reports. An example is the New York **News** and its story on the FTC's critical report on life insurance, in which the government issued the report and the newspaper headline magnified it — perhaps too much.

In his book, **Deciding What's News**, Columbia University sociologist Herbert Gans claims that journalists print news about business corruption when it becomes available.[22] Private firms have been fairly successful in preventing access for investigative reporters. This "wall of secrecy" has made it difficult for a reporter to obtain information. William H. Carlly, a **Wall Street Journal** reporter, stated (Milwaukee **Journal**, 24 February 1979) that business writers have an obligation to break through this "wall" that executives throw around their firms. Carlly warns, however, that any reporter will have difficulty obtaining news about corporations. "Corporation secrecy is the first thing you are going to run into," he said. "You would be surprised how many times I have heard 'no comment' in the last 18 years."

In a study of corporate-media relations conducted by Otto Lerbinger, a questionnaire was sent to 150 public relations/public affairs vice presidents or directors of **Fortune** 500 companies. The selection of companies was based on every second company on the list; questionnaires were then sent to those companies that had a public relations practitioner listed in the "Register of Public Relations Society of America." The total sample consisted of 55 companies.[23]

One survey question asked: What information and views — other than product and financial publicity — do you seek to bring to the attention of the media? The six most frequently mentioned answers indicated businesses prefer "good news:"

- Corporate social responsibility programs;
- Environmental achievements and the need for trade-offs;
- Human side of corporate life, personal glimpses of management;
- Research, technical achievements, innovations;
- Positions on legislative or regulatory matters;
- Employee recognition.

But the amount of promotional puff and corporate advocacy coverage more than offsets negative news coverage. Many newspapers feel a responsibility to promote local business and they run glowing profiles of successful businesspeople, optimistic predictions of corporate growth and expansion and warm accounts of community service projects. Kent MacDougall writes (Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980) that business writers are more sympathetic to business than general assignment reporters, who are apt to quote populist politicians, public interest advocates and other business critics. Even more sympathetic than business reporters are editorial writers, MacDougall says, who believe that businesspeople have the public interest at heart and are working to build a better country. For example, the Pasco (Wash.) **Tri-City Herald** endorsed the commercial dumping of radioactive nuclear wastes at the government's nearby Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Headlines carried such promotions as "Waste Could Be $20 Billion Hanford Business" and "Harrisburg Accident Could Benefit Hanford." (Los Angeles **Times**, February 1980).

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As business coverage continues to increase, confrontations between business and the media, as seen in the Des Moines **Register** case, will also increase. Businesspeople, economists and media representatives are concerned with correcting the situation. Since the underlying problem exists in the adversarial relationship between the two institutions, Frederic West suggests that news people "make sure that personal prejudice doesn't color the way the news is presented." [24] At the same time, he told the business community to stop worrying about media prejudice since "some of the reporting that gets our blood is probably more muddled than it is malicious."[25]

David Finn, co-founder and chairman of Ruder and Finn, takes West's suggestions one step further, saying business should understand that the media must present news in a way that will attract readership. Yet the media should be careful not to make the selling of news more important than the news itself, he says.[26] Finn then suggests that an objective third party be present during any important meeting between an executive and a journalist.[27]

While understanding will not occur overnight, business and the media can begin to communicate. West says business should issue more accurately written press releases, make an effort to have more personal contact by executives with the media and educate journalists through plant tours and seminars.[28] The business community has already begun to educate journalists through the university programs offered at Columbia and Carnegie-Mellon universities and at the University of Missouri at Columbia. These programs are designed for working reporters who go back to school to study economics, finance and business. The John Hancock Company gives annual awards to individuals who have excelled in business reporting.

Lewis Young asks business executives to understand the limitations and pressures that journalists have to cope with, such as deadlines and space limitations.[29] But Lewis W. Foy, chairman and chief executive officer of Bethlehem Steel, wants journalists to understand the constraints of business, especially those that limit the revealing of certain information.[30] "It's become a fact of corporate life that practically every public statement has to be reviewed by legal counsel, and that can take time," Foy said.[31]

CONCLUSION

Even if the above solutions are implemented, it will also take time for business news to receive the thorough, objective and accurate coverage advocated by business economists and the media. The importance of better business news coverage is indicated by the increase in size and quality of business news staffs, the funding of university programs and the concern of reporters, editors and the business community.

Although business and the media will never become advocates of each other's functions, it is possible for a mutual respect and professional relationship to develop between the two institutions. Both do agree, however, that improvements are necessary in business news coverage, especially as the demand for more business news increases and business becomes everyone's business.

FOOTNOTES

1. Quoted in Dom Bonafede, "The Bull Market in Business Economics Reporting," **Washington Journalism Review** (July/August 1980): 23.
2. Quoted in Kent MacDougall, "A Business Problem: Bull Market in Bad News," **Washington Journalism Review** (July/August 1980): 33.
3. **Ibid.**
4. **Ibid.**
5. **Ibid.**
6. Donald Kirsch, **Financial and Economic Journalism: Analysis, Interpretation and Reporting** (New York: New York University Press, 1978), pp. 1-9.
7. Louis M. Kohlmeier, Jan G. Udell, and Laud B. Anderson, **Reporting on Business and the Economy** (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), p. 8.
8. Bonafede, p. 24.
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